

Mudslinging

by Jennifer Owings Dewey

Some families stick together like glue. Others use mud. This information about one Native American group will give you a new view of marriage.

Connect to Your Life

When you think of the word *wedding*, what pictures come to your mind? Jot down a description or make a quick sketch.

Key to the Article

A **ritual** is an action or a ceremony. People perform a ritual to celebrate or to recognize a special event. This informative article tells about mudslinging, a ritual of the Hopi people.

Vocabulary Preview

Words to Know

custom hilarity
sacred disputes
wistful



Reading Coach
CD-ROM selection

FOCUS

Read to discover what happens during the first part of the Mudslinging ritual.

“Here is something hard to believe,” a Hopi friend named Dan once told me. “Adult people throwing mud at each other for a reason. It’s a Hopi custom we call Mudslinging.”

“Tell me,” I urged. I’d never heard of Mudslinging. It sounded like fun to have a reason to throw mud at somebody.

custom

(kūs’ tēm)
n. something
done regularly by
a group

“Marriage is a solemn passage among the Hopi,” Dan said. “In our villages the wedding ceremonies go on for a week. The day before the wedding, the groom’s father visits the bride’s house. He knocks on the door and insists on being let in. With him are other members of the groom’s family: aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers.

solemn

passage
serious event

“Those inside the house open the door just a crack and say, ‘Who are you? What do you want?’ They act like they don’t know him. ‘War is declared!’ the groom’s father announces loudly. He pushes the door open, and then the craziness begins.”

Dan pauses before going on with his story. He grins, his dark eyes shiny with humor.

“The groom and his family have secretly prepared buckets of mud, which they have brought with them. The mud is four different colors, one for each of the four directions: north, south, east, and west.

It is sacred mud. These people rush into the bride’s house and grab everyone, including the bride, and drag them out into the yard.

sacred

(sā’ krīd)
adj. holy

The groom’s family dig into the buckets of mud and begin throwing it, smearing it on every person they can catch. The bride’s family dip into the

mud, too. Before long the yard is swarming with people of all ages, from babies to old grandmothers and grandfathers, flinging mud at each other as if they've lost their minds.

40 "While this goes on, some of the mud throwers yell insults back and forth at each other. It is the aunties of the groom who do this. They say how ugly the bride is, what a terrible cook her mother is, things like that."

THINK IT THROUGH

What happens to the bride's side of the family?

FOCUS

The description of Mudslinging continues. Find out what Dan sees as a possible reason for Mudslinging.

I laughed to hear this. "What happens next?" I asked. Dan was eager to continue his description of the Mudslinging.

50 "If the bride's people are able to catch the groom's father, they hold him down and give him a haircut. This makes him feel foolish. It's an insult." Dan's grin widened. "The Mudslinging ends peacefully. Once the buckets are emptied and everyone is coated with mud, the participants shake hands and make peace. Food is shared, a feast of corn and mutton, a lot of food."

REREAD

Retell what happens here.

"And the wedding takes place the next day?" I asked.

"Yes," Dan said, a wistful expression appearing on his handsome face. "This is how it was for me when I got married."

wistful

(wɪst' fəl)
adj. dreamy

There was much hilarity, and sacred rituals, too, and then I became a husband, no longer a single man.”

hilarity

(hǐ lǎr' ǐ tē)
n. fun and laughter

60 “Why do they do the Mudslinging? Was it fun when it happened to you? Or was it horrible?”

“It was a lot of fun. Maybe the reason for it is to get troubles over with in a happy way before the marriage, the mother-in-law problems, the father-in-law problems.”

I nodded. It made sense.

“When two families come together and become joined, there are always disputes. It’s expected. Mudslinging gets everyone’s energy
70 for arguing out of the way, at least for a while,” Dan added. A thoughtful smile came to his face when he was finished with his storytelling.

disputes

(dǐ spyōōts')
n. arguments

THINK IT THROUGH

1. What does Dan think is the reason for Mudslinging?
2. How does Dan feel about Mudslinging? How do you know?
3. If you could, would you participate in a Mudslinging? Why or why not?